

Open Research Online

The Open University's repository of research publications and other research outputs

Deleuze, Spinoza and Psychology: Notes towards an 'experience ecology'

Journal Item

How to cite:

Brown, Steven D. (2018). Deleuze, Spinoza and Psychology: Notes towards an 'experience ecology'. Annual Review of Critical Psychology, 14 pp. 51–66.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© [not recorded]



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Version: Version of Record

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

<https://discourseunit.com/annual-review/arcp-14-putting-the-deleuzean-machine-to-work-in-psychology-2018/>

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's data [policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

oro.open.ac.uk

DELEUZE, SPINOZA AND PSYCHOLOGY

NOTES TOWARDS AN 'EXPERIENCE ECOLOGY'

Steven D. Brown^{*}

The Open University, U.K.

Introduction

The work of Gilles Deleuze has much to offer contemporary thinking in psychology. As the papers in this volume show, the restructuring of what are usually taken as 'topics' for psychological analysis into genuine ontological and epistemological concerns leads to a profound questioning of how we think about the nature of 'the psychological' and the ways it can be studied. As Paul Stenner and I claimed in *Psychology Without Foundations*, the encounter with Deleuze does not so much provide a new grounding for the discipline, but instead calls into question the very idea of premising psychology on a clearly defined notion of 'substance', whether it be mind, body, brain, society, conversation or some judiciously defined amalgam of terms. The psychological is *everywhere* – in the sense that we cannot extract it from the myriad processes through which it is continuously enacted – and *nowhere* in particular, because it is not a 'thing' that has a simple location in some place or other.

Placing the psychological within the philosophical tradition of 'process thinking', via Deleuze, is initially destabilising. It invites the immediate retort that, if psychology cannot adequately define its subject matter in advance, then it surely has little right to make a legitimate claim to be a discipline, particularly at a time when neuroscience and behavioural economics are gnawing away at both ends of the intellectual terrain. But breaking up established thinking is just one part of the Deleuzian project; it is always accompanied by the positing of a new set of concepts and enquiries. In a quasi-dialectical fashion, deterritorialization cannot be separated from reterritorialization (see Williams, 2013). To that end, there is an equivalent task of developing and honing a

^{*} Address for correspondence: steven.brown@open.ac.uk

different series of 'images of the psychological' and corresponding conceptual vocabulary that runs alongside the Deleuzian critique of extant psychology.

In this paper, I want to offer the example of 'ecological psychology' as one area where the dynamic of critique and reconceptualization through Deleuze can be considered. Here using the proper name 'Deleuze' is somewhat misleading since, as I hope to show, what is named is a point of intersection between a philosophical body of work and other intellectual currents, coming from practices as diverse as anthropology, biology and theatre. My argument is that as psychologists we are mistaken to imagine that Deleuze can provide us with the philosophical resources that we need to think through our own disciplinary problems. To do so is to both underestimate the complex relationship that Deleuze has to the canon of philosophy, along with the highly specific nature of 'philosophical problems', and to the more general problem of the relationship between practices that Deleuze and Guattari open up in *What is Philosophy?* (1994) What is needed instead is to recognise that Deleuze serves as both irritant and catalyst to psychological enquiry.

Deleuze as philosopher and nonphilosopher

Throughout his life, a considerable proportion of Deleuze's writing consisted of his unique exegesis of other philosophers, most notably Bergson, Nietzsche, Leibniz, Hume and Spinoza. Whilst his engagement with Bergson effectively bookended his work, forming the basis for some of his earliest essays (see Deleuze 2004) and the crucial theme of the virtual and the actual, developed best in *Cinema 1* (1986) and *Cinema 2* (1989), and which he was still picking over in *Immanence: A life* (2001), published months before his death. But in purely quantitative terms, Deleuze spent more time writing directly on Spinoza than on any other philosopher. Spinoza was the subject of Deleuze's secondary doctoral thesis in 1968 (1992), and the 'Christ of Philosophers' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994: 60) became a repeated point of reference thereafter until the very end – 'The transcendental field thus becomes a genuine plane of immanence, reintroducing Spinozism into the most elemental operation of philosophy' (Deleuze, 2006: 386).

Spinoza occupies a curious position in the history of philosophy. Born a generation later than Descartes) and dying roughly a century before Kant's revolutionary *Critique of Pure Reason*, Spinoza stands between what would usually be considered as the birth of modern philosophy and the Western Enlightenment. In this sense, Spinoza's work points both backwards, in its concerns with establishing ontological principles, and forwards in its desire to mobilise philosophy as a challenge to a politics of domination and alienation. Deleuze often conflates these aspects of Spinoza, in part by arguing that in *Ethics*, Spinoza deliberately constructed a text operating at multiple levels:

This is the style at work in Spinoza's seemingly calm Latin. He sets three languages resonating in his outwardly dormant language, a triple straining. The Ethics is a book of concepts (the second kind of knowledge), but of affects (the first kind) and percepts (the third kind) too. Thus the paradox in Spinoza is that he's the most philosophical of philosophers, the purest in some sense, but also the one who more than any other addresses nonphilosophers and calls forth the most intense nonphilosophical understanding. This is why absolutely anyone can read Spinoza, and be very moved, or see things quite differently afterward, even if they can hardly understand Spinoza's concepts. Conversely, a historian of philosophy who understands only Spinoza's concepts doesn't fully understand him. (Deleuze, 1990a: 165-6)

I would venture that we are meant to grasp the fairly direct implication here that Deleuze is also describing his own philosophical aspirations. He is a philosopher who addresses nonphilosophers, and hence one whose work cannot be fully grasped as situated within the history of philosophy itself. But the converse is also true. There is much in Deleuze's work that we nonphilosophers – by which I mean, those whose vocation lies outside the formal practice and institutions of philosophy – can 'hardly understand', since honing the purity of philosophical thinking is simply not our concern. This means that there are vast swathes of both Deleuze and Spinoza (and Deleuze on Spinoza) that appear to pass us by. For example, much of *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza* is taken up with considering the significance of Spinoza's substitution of the term 'expression', which Deleuze treats as something akin to 'emergence' or 'supervenience', for the medieval term 'emanation', which could be thought of as resembling 'transmission'. The philosophical problem at stake here is fundamental. Cartesian dualism divides mind from body, but reunites them in relation to a third 'master' position – God – which is the formal, emanative basis on which the whole dualistic basis of personhood is constructed. Whatever we are is first in God. Spinoza, by contrast, sees bodies and ideas as dual aspects of a singular substance, which is famously referred to in Ethics as 'God; or nature'. This holistic, all-encompassing substance is constantly modifying itself but, crucially, each modification is a development or emergent property of substance, such that whilst every being may be said to be 'within' God/Nature, they are irreducible to some pre-existing design or form. The significance of this is to replace the idea of a transcendent world of ideas, which stands above and beyond yet drives all human experience, with the idea of immanence and self-creation (or autopoiesis), where potentiality is already contained within the world itself. Put slightly differently, novelty and difference is a creative process undergone by the world with neither transcendent direction nor prior blueprint (see Bruun Jensen, this volume).

As the refusal to posit a conceptual or spiritual realm lying beyond the world of potential lived experience, immanence is a rich philosophical concept. It is also notoriously

difficult to develop adequately. Whitehead ([1929]1978), for example, had recourse to a doctrine of 'eternal objects' and thought is necessary to find a place for God within his process metaphysics (see Stengers, 2011), whilst Deleuze ultimately turned to Bergson's notion of 'virtuality' as a means of resolving how a world can become other to itself when it has no outside. But what then is the psychological significance of immanence? Whilst psychology still struggles to fully wrest itself of dualism, it does not typically rely upon the idea of transcendence, with the possible exception of poorly executed use of genetics of evolutionary adaptation as explanatory 'grand narratives'. We can articulate the problem better by turning it towards ecological psychology.

Person-environment relationships

Harry Heft's (2001) detailed account of the lineage that runs from William James' radical empiricism to JJ Gibson's (1979) *Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, by way of EB Holt, provides a compelling argument for seeing ecological psychology as an operationalization of the concept of immanence. James famously argued for 'pure experience' as a metaphysical starting point (James, 1906), an undivided flow of potential experiences that are immanent to the relations we have to the world. As Heft shows, James is not denying the existence of a material world, but rather proposing that the 'conceptual orders' through which we come to know the world, and thus have specific, discrete experiences, are extracted from the world itself. The dynamic lived relation between knower and known is primary and contains 'more' in terms of 'latent structures' of knowledge than are expressed by any particular given experience (see Heft, 2001: 54-57).

Translating this into psychological terms, we might say that as persons, we are already embedded in relationships with the world around us that dispose us towards particular kinds of experiences. Describing these person-environment relationships adequately then becomes the primary task of psychological analysis. Ecological psychology, in its various forms, offers a series of approaches towards such description. Kurt Lewin (1936), for example, develops 'life space' as a means of conceptualising the field of possible actions in which the person is situated. Gibson (1979) focuses on the perceptual relationship between the person and the affordances – or 'behavioural invitations' – of the environment. In both cases, there is a kind selectivity at work. We do not necessarily act upon, nor perhaps even grasp the range of potential actions that are available to us. The most basic psychological operation is that of reducing or cutting out the pathways to actions we wish to accomplish from the myriad others to which we are immediately disposed. In this way, we can see that a fundamental error in modern psychology has been to over-invest in the idea of representation – that mental processes 'add' to the

world rather than ‘subtract’ or ‘extract’ from a field of possibilities (a point already discussed at length by Bergson in 1908 in *Matter and Memory*).

But in making this claim, it can seem that we tacked too far back in the direction of a form of empiricism which sees the ideational as constituted out of elementary building blocks of perception. Gregory Bateson (1973) provides the modern form of Humean empiricism in his description of mind as the distributed system of organising ‘differences which make a difference’ (i.e. information). Although Bateson is working in a cybernetic framework that we would now call ‘open systems’, and with a notion of information that is far more dynamic than that which would be adopted in the standard model of cognition (see Nichterlein, 2013), this kind of approach does seem at odds with an elaborated theory of meaning, such as that associated with phenomenology. The solution proposed by Heft (2001) is to see ‘effort towards meaning’ as being a distinctively human activity that is enacted through symbolic elaboration of person-environment relations. This arises from the relative complexity of the human organism in comparison with other forms of organic life. So whilst meaning is latent within ‘conceptual orders’ grounded in the world, it remains the preserve of the human to accomplish this kind of semiosis.

This kind of operationalization of immanence in psychology then seems to arrive back at privileging of the human subject, and a return to something like symbolic representation as the principal conceptual tool to understand what makes us persons. Spinoza and Deleuze would then be something of a detour that brings psychology back to where it started, but with perhaps an increased awareness of the material grounding of psychological operations. At this point it is worth returning to a crucial, and oft-cited, aspect of Deleuze’s interpretation of Spinoza as an *ethologist*.

The worlds of animals and humans

As a kind of addendum to the publication of his secondary thesis, Deleuze (1988) published a short work on Spinoza, which elaborates on key terms from *Ethics*. In a brief final section of the book, Deleuze reflects on the then contemporary significance of Spinoza’s philosophy. In *Ethics*, Spinoza describes how ‘bodies’ and ‘ideas’ are two attributes of a single substance. The attributes are divided into ‘modes’, which corresponds to the elements of the world of experience. Deleuze offers the term ‘plane of immanence’ in place of substance, and then proceeds to draw out the implications of seeing ideas and bodies as two aspects of the same field – every body has its conceptual dimension, just as every idea has a material existence. The ordering of bodies in relation to one another is simultaneously the ordering of ideas. Thinking is not some abstract activity, but a physical encounter with the world (see Brown & Stenner, 2001). Spinoza grounds his theory of knowing on this intimacy of the physical and the ideational.

Embodied encounters that increase the organism's powers to act and to feel are, at the same time, experienced as an expansion in the capacity for thought. If, for Descartes, the route to adequate knowledge was through reduction to the cogito, for Spinoza it is, by contrast, expanded out into our worldly encounter. We think as we feel. Thinking is part of an affective field.

Spinoza's elaboration of this theory of knowing involves more subtlety and ethical nuance than can be described briefly (see instead Negri, 1991; 2013). What is relevant here is that Deleuze focuses on the term *affect* to describe both the capacity of the body for entering into relations with others and the transformations brought about in the body as consequence of such encounters. An organism can, Deleuze claims, be described in terms of its affective capacity. He then goes on to argue that this renders Spinoza as a forerunner to modern ethology:

Every reader of Spinoza knows that for him bodies and minds are not substances or subject, but modes. For, concretely, a mode is a complex relation of speed and slowness, in the body but also in thought, and it is a capacity for affecting of being affected, pertaining to the body or to thought. Concretely, if you define bodies and thoughts as capacities for affecting and being affected, many things change. You will define an animal, or a human being, not by its form, its organs and its functions, and not as a subject either; you will define it by the affects of which it is capable. Affective capacity, with a maximum threshold and minimal threshold, is a constant notion in Spinoza ... Long after Spinoza, biologists and naturalists will try to describe animal worlds defined by affects and capacities for affecting and being affected. For example, Jakob von Uexküll will do this for the tick, an animal that sucks the blood of mammals. He will define this animal by three affects: the first has to do with light (climb to the top of a branch); the second is olfactive (let yourself fall onto the mammal that passes beneath the branch); and the third is thermal (seek the area without fur, the warmest spot). A world with only three affects, in the midst of all that goes on in the immense forest. (Deleuze, 1988: 124-125)

Deleuze recruits the work of Jakob von Uexküll, the Estonian biologist, as exemplification of how Spinozist thinking is retained in modern approaches to studying the environmental contexts of organic life. von Uexküll ([1934]2010) developed the notion of 'umwelt' to describe the perceptual world of an organism, such as a tick. The world of every organism depends on the reciprocal relationship between its sensory capacities and the affordances of the environment in which they dwell. So whilst many different species might co-exist in the same physical location, following von Uexküll, we may treat each species as having its own radically specific umwelt. As a consequence, we may see psychology as the study of the 'human umwelt' – on which see Shotter & Newson (1982).

It is at this point that we have to confront a major issue in Deleuze's scholarship. When reflecting on his own intellectual practice, Deleuze, in no unproblematic terms, described his reading of philosophical texts as producing 'monstrous' readings that, whilst faithful to the letter of the text, deliberately transformed the work into something other (see Deleuze, 1990a: 6). But it is notably that nowhere in his writing (so far as I am aware) does Deleuze reflect in a similar way on his practice with regard to the nonphilosophical work he engages with. Like many of his contemporaries, Deleuze was concerned with literary and artistic practices, albeit at the 'high' rather than 'popular' end of culture. And in doing so, it has been repeatedly observed that rather than bring philosophical analysis to bear upon the practice in question in a crude explanatory fashion, he treats the engagement as an opportunity to 'do philosophy' through a different medium. However, this means that Deleuze is often very selective in what he takes as relevant. For example, whilst the Cinema books demonstrate Deleuze's sustained and passionate knowledge of film and film-making, he has very little to say about the place of sound and music in the cinematic experience (see Warde-Brown, 2017). When it comes to his use of non-philosophical material from other disciplines, this selectivity is greatly increased. As Bruun Jensen & Rödje (2009) describe, Deleuze's use of anthropological material, especially in *A Thousand Plateaus*, demonstrates a very limited grasp of the history and concerns of that discipline, to the point of bringing into question the legitimacy of the use of the examples themselves. This is particularly acute in the case of those disciplines that fall between the cracks of the triumvirate of philosophy, art and science, which Deleuze & Guattari (1994) proclaim as having responsibility for generating knowledge of concepts, affects and percepts respectively, leaving little room for the social sciences (see Brown and Stenner, 2009).

Perhaps there is something of a quid pro quo here. If we are allowed not to 'get' the more narrowly philosophical side of Deleuze, then we must similarly forego his selective interest in other disciplines. But, as the use of von Uexküll above demonstrates, it is important to not to lose sight of the creativity of Deleuzian exegesis. von Uexküll does not treat the world of the tick as composed of three affects. Instead, he regards the tick's umwelt as defined by three 'marks' or signs formed by odor, temperature and the hairiness of other animals. Marks/signs serve as 'carriers of meaning', and, as such, are crucial to the way the organism navigates its umwelt. For von Uexküll, 'anything and everything that comes under the spell of an environment is either re-directed or re-formed until it becomes a useful carrier of meaning or it is completely neglected' (2010: 144). By this, he means that selected qualities of a thing or an organism are transformed into 'perception marks' that are meaningful within the umwelt. But these marks have a relationship to what von Uexküll calls 'effect marks'. For example, a rock lying on a path can appear as an obstacle, but picked up and thrown at a menacing dog, its signification becomes that of defence or weapon. The elements of an umwelt are then continuously being shaped by their signification as perception and effect marks.

These semiotic aspects of von Uexküll are selectively avoided in Deleuze's interpretation, despite these being of central significance for interpreters of his work as varied as Thomas Sebeok (2001) and Jaan Vaalsiner (Vaalsiner & Gertz, 2007). Deleuze is, of course, highly versed in semiotics, as his reading of Proust (2000) demonstrates. But the lack of a discussion of signs in one of the most well cited of Deleuze's illustrations of affect creates some difficulties. It overshadows the careful separation of concepts, percepts and affects that is already present in other aspects of Deleuze's reading of Spinoza, and which becomes decisive in later works such as *What is Philosophy?* Affect can then appear to be something of a universal medium in which more precise psychological questions about the structuring of experience become washed out. In particular, the duality of ideas/affects and minds/bodies that is at the heart of Spinoza's metaphysics becomes rather lost. This means in turn that in order to get a theory of meaning out of this work, we may be tempted to return to a position close to that of Heft in arguing the human umwelt consists of not only infinitely more affective dimension, but also in a unique capacity for symbolisation. To avoid this we will have to dig a little harder into Deleuze's interpretation of Spinoza and add in some other supporting work.

'A tree of will which walks will return'

Any theory of meaning involves discussion of one or more of three related domains: language or conceptual system (meaning relative to a set of propositions), an actual state of affairs (meaning relative to a referent) and subjectivity (meaning for someone). Whilst it seems obvious that a coherent theory of meaning ought to encompass all these domains, the endless paradoxes that result from such attempts have given rise to many of schisms in modern philosophy, not least the analytic/continental division. In particular, following Frege, the referential aspect of meaning (i.e. the relationship between a proposition and its supposed referent) does not appear to serve as an adequate anchor, since propositions change their meaning considerably whilst remaining attached to the same referent, and may even refer to non-existent objects. This results in a distinction between the *sense* of a proposition – the thought that the proposition expresses – and *reference*, as the object to which a proposition is about. We might think of 'sense' as a kind of ideational tissue that spans the various domains of language, world and subjectivity, without being reducible to any one.

In *The Logic of Sense* (1990b), Deleuze explores the structure of sense through considering its paradoxical relationship to non-sense (specifically, the writings of Lewis Carroll and Antonin Artaud). For Deleuze, sense is an 'event' that emerges between propositions, the states of affairs to which they refer, and the subject who is discursively situated by what the proposition expresses. Sense is an 'incorporeal event' that is

extracted from states of affairs, but which, nevertheless, cannot be rendered distinct from them. For example, the sense of the proposition 'the time she scared away the vicious dog' is neither located in the language naming the event, nor in the physical acts to which it is attributed, nor for that matter 'within' any subject who might articulate that proposition. Sense is something else, a kind of relation that inheres across description, act and person. It is both of the world, and a transformation of that world. To return to von Uexküll, we might say that in acting upon a mark/sign, a sense is expressed that cannot be localised to either the *umwelt*, the conceptual schemas through which it is understood, nor to organism who engages with mark/sign.

To gain a better grasp of what sense might mean in this context, it is worth turning towards Antonin Artaud (for a more detailed account see Brown & Stenner, 2009: 86-108). In a varied and uneven career spanning the first half of the twentieth century, the French cultural provocateur Artaud turned his hand to film acting, poetry, theatrical production, literature, magic, painting, 'performance art' and radio plays. The arc of this work could perhaps be summed up best as the attempt to destroy the referential function of language in order to push towards an encounter with 'pure sense'. His work starts with reasonably conventional poetry and ends with performances marked with atonal music and language transformed into howls. But throughout Artaud returns to the same problem – what is expressed by language eludes the meaning of the proposition. For Artaud, the search for sense requires the recognition that language itself is a kind of 'body'. Thus dissecting language in the pursuit of sense becomes, at a certain point, indistinguishable from a work performed on one's own body, which is in turn part of undoing one's self. The problem, as Artaud sees it, is that language, bodies and selves secrete forms of order within themselves – which Artaud refers to as 'organs' – that sterilise and domesticate the experience of sense. Pure sense would then be to arrive at experience where distinctions are no longer operative – words strike the ear as bodies, subjects are no different to walking trees of will, the body is an expression of life that can feel and connect beyond the narrowness of 'being human'. The phrase that Artaud uses for this desired experience of pure sense is 'body without organs' (Artaud, 1995: 307).

The body without organs, as pure sense, is of a piece with James' notion of pure experience. It is the mixing of thought, world and person that serves as the matrix for particular kinds of experience. The psychological significance of this concept is that it denotes a field that includes but also extends way beyond immediate person-environment relations, but which is nevertheless essential to grasping the nature of those relationships. Lewin (1997), for example, came to recognise that life space could not adequately described, in either discursive or mathematical terms, without positing how it opened out onto a broader field of non-psychological forces (which he confusingly termed the 'psychological field') which shaped life space. For example, in his wartime work on food choices, Lewin insisted that it was not possible to explain why

persons would be prepared to eat particular foods without detailing the broader social, industrial, economic and agricultural forces that resulted in the person being confronted with particular kind of choices (see Lewin, 1997). Whilst Lewin went further perhaps than any psychologist has to date in making these forces part of a psychological vocabulary, he ultimately held back from recognising that these were not separate fields, but rather a single plane of experience composed of entangled relations. Acknowledging the immanence of the 'psychological field' (i.e. broader social forces) to life space makes it possible to renew Lewin's vision for a psychology that overcomes the dualism of person and environment.

With regard to ecological psychology, the equivalent move is to recognise that the *umwelt* which an organism experiences has a relational composition that extends way beyond immediate perceptual, conceptual and affective experience. For example, the world of von Uexküll's ticks is shaped by deforestation to increase grazing space for cattle, as part of the global drive for profit maximisation in the agribusiness. And our human *umwelt* is simultaneously being reshaped by the increasing efficacy of bacterial life that is directly related to failure of existing antibiotics due to their over-use in this same industry to accelerate the breeding period of cattle and fowl from birth to knife. These broader forces are not external to the psychological. We cannot begin to describe particular experiences without situating them in relation to this extended field that lends sense to experience without need for neither bounded subjectivity nor clear referent.

It is here that Deleuze's reading of Spinoza has its greatest value. Following Massumi (2002), we are used to treating the term affect as a way into experience that bypasses semiotics. In doing so, affect is typically used to refer to embodied entanglements that exceed subjectivity and the overcoding effects of signification. But in Spinoza affect and meaning stand in equivalent relation to one another. If meaning is what emerges from the ordering of ideas, then affect plays a similar role in relation to the ordering of bodies. Our semiotic and embodied life is lived across these dual registers (or 'attributes' for Spinoza). Neither Spinoza nor Deleuze is offering affect up as the 'royal road' to grasping experience as non-subjective and a-signifying. What they are pointing to instead is a philosophical and, to some extent, practical epistemic strategy. If the ordering of bodies and ideas are grounded in a singular substance, then our efforts to create 'efficacious' order in one register should be automatically reflected in the other. However, as Spinoza shows in his critique of Descartes, establishing what counts as 'adequacy' with regard to ideas alone – the epistemic strategy which dominates western philosophy – is fraught with technical problems. By contrast, affect, as the increase or diminishment in our power to act, provides a golden thread by which we can begin to order and expand experience through experimenting with relational encounters. An increase in our affective capacities, is, for Spinoza, both 'joyful', and, simultaneously, an extension in the 'adequacy' of our ideas. When Spinoza declares that 'no one has yet determined what the body can do', this is not a rallying call to abandon meaning, but rather a

strategic choice to use affect as the medium through which to expand and enrich our knowledge of the world. Knowing what the body can do is the route to better knowing, and, ultimately, the kind of grounded wisdom or 'blessedness' that Spinoza see as coming from recognising the world's immanence to our own being.

The implication of all this for ecological psychology, and for psychology more generally, is with the doubling of the affective and the semiotic. Rather than treat these as distinct domains of experience, the challenge is to see how fluctuations in our affective capacities 'show up' simultaneously as emergent orders of meaning. In doing so, we may follow the strategy of Spinoza and Deleuze in attending to embodied encounters, not in the effort to overcome meaning, but precisely in order to grasp its emergence. And, crucially, we need also to orient towards the third term – 'sense' – as the means of thinking the duality of affect and meaning. Bodies and ideas are not united in a subject, but instead in the emergence of an incorporeal event that is expressed simultaneously in both an affective and a semiotic register. Sense and sense-making is often treated as the outcome of individual or collective efforts to make order out of the disorderly – the 'aha!' moment of sudden realisation and clarity. Yet we may think of it, on the contrary, not as something added to the world, but rather as the 'actualisation' or 'conrescence' of a specific experience that is already of the world, albeit as a 'potential' or 'virtual' set of relations.

Experience ecology

I want to conclude by discussing a concept that articulates some of the issues we have worked through in the operationalization of Deleuze and Spinoza in psychology. Over the past ten years, I have worked on a number of studies with Paula Reavey and other collaborators which have explored the lived experience of mental health service users who are detained within medium-secure psychiatric care (see Brown & Reavey, 2015). One of the issues we have encountered is that during the course of detention, service users develop ways of relating to self that transform their past experience. We have seen this most markedly around sexuality and personal relationships. Service users report that they come to view their sexuality as displaced or 'amputated' during their passage through the secure care system (Brown et al, 2014). This arises through their exposure to discourses of 'risk' that dominate secure care. The expression of sexual desires is prohibited in secure care, and, to compound matters, service users are routinely directed to self-police their own sexual desires, which are seen as 'unhealthy'. This has clear implications for their longer term journey towards recovery, especially in cases where service users are detained during early adulthood, with the result that they resume their life within the community having missed out on a crucial period in their development of their capacity to form intimate relationships with others. This is

especially problematic given that it is well established that the capacity to form meaningful intimate relationships is associated with recovery from episodes of poor mental health (see Cromby et al, 2013).

We have evidence that the kinds of ways that service users come to understand their own sexuality and sexual agency during detention persist when they return to care in the community. The experiences that occur during detention structure how service users think and feel about themselves when they leave secure care. To put this in the terms described previously, the shift from one *umwelt* to another seems to involve carrying across a learned embodied relationship to oneself that goes beyond a shift in discursive or semiotic frameworks. It is simultaneously a different ordering in embodied relationships and in the capacity to feel in specific ways. Here ideas and bodies really do seem to be two aspects of the same thing. A service user may no longer be formally considered to be a threat to themselves or to others, but the idea of that threat ‘inheres’ in a very intimate way in how they feel about their life and their desires.

The historian of medicine, Edward Shorter (1992), once offered the idea of a ‘symptom pool’ to describe the way that psychosomatic symptoms appeared at particular historical moments. For example, hysterical paralysis dominated the way the persons expressed non-organically derived distress at the turn of the 19th and 20th century, whereas debilitating fatigue is now the primary symptom reported by persons who have not (yet) received a diagnosis of physical illness. Shorter suggests that there are discrete number of ways of experiencing oneself at any given time and place. We want to build on this to say that this holds for forms of experience more generally. How we feel and relate to ourselves is embedded in a field of possible experiences that has a specific sociocultural determination. Events of sense are expressed with particular intensity in specific places and times, in the way that Deleuze and Guattari (1988), following Bateson (1973), suggest. In this way, the human *umwelt* is not a given, but is rather a shifting field of experience that is both radically specific – in that our capacity to feel in particular ways about ourselves is related to the practices in which we participate – and generalised in ways that are difficult to map – for example, through the transmission of sentiments and bodily practices across diverse media.

We have developed the concept of ‘experience ecology’ as a way of indexing particular kinds of experience to the domains in which they are cultivated and expressed. Risk, for example, is a complicated discourse with its own history, but which is made relevant in complicated ways in secure settings. Risk is not just a way of making meaning out of the immediate environment, it is also inscribed into social space in the form of signs/marks that act to shape actions, such as in the design of furniture, walls and doors. As such, risk is also felt as much as it is understood, since it inheres in the way that relations between bodies are organised. The ‘sense’ of risk then inheres across discourses and bodies and gives rise to certain kinds of subjectivities, but it emerges from the broader

field or experience ecology. This ecology stretches way beyond any given hospital or other given social space. In the same way that Lewin insisted that understanding food choice needed to map the relationships between agriculture, markets and homes, so the experience ecology of risk needs to attend to complex relationships between medicine, law, social welfare, communities and housing.

But there is something more within the ecology. It is here that Deleuze's notion of 'plane of immanence', James' 'pure experience', Bateson's 'plateau' and Artaud's 'body without organs' converge. The field of forces out of which particular experiences are actualised also goes beyond any particular experience. It opens up onto experiences that are as-yet-un-actualised, experiences that are currently 'impossible', in the sense that they are not part of the grammar of self-relations that are pointed out by signs within the experience ecology, but which nevertheless are beginning to emerge, or at least becoming imaginable. There are experiences of voice hearing, for example, that involve novel relationships between hearer and heard, speaker and what is spoken, that depart from current understandings of mental health and bring with them new understandings of sensory experiences that are not shared by other people. As psychologists, our role is to act as cartographers of extant experience ecologies, but we also have a responsibility towards engaging with the emergence of the un-thought, the experiences-to-come, towards life in the making.

References

- Artaud, A. (1995). To have done with the judgement of God. *Watchfiends and rack screams: Works from the final period* (C. Eshleman & B. Bador, Trans). Boston: Exact Change.
- Bateson, G. (1973). *Steps towards an ecology of mind*. New York: Peregrine.
- Bergson, H. ([1908]1991). *Matter and Memory*. New York: Zone.
- Brown, S.D. (2009). Between the planes: Deleuze and social science. In *Deleuzian Intersections in Science, Technology and Anthropology*, eds. C. Bruun Jensen and K. Rodje. Oxford: Berghahn, pp. 101-120.
- Brown, S.D., Reavey, P. (2015). *Vital Memory and Affect: Living with a difficult past*. London: Routledge.
- Brown, S.D. Reavey, P., Kanyeredzi, A. & Batty, R. (2014). Transformations of self and sexuality: psychiatric inpatients accounts of sexuality and relationships. *Health*, 18: 240-260.
- Brown, S.D. and Stenner, P. (2001). Being affected: Spinoza and the psychology of emotion. *International Journal of Group Tensions*, 30(1): 81-105.
- Brown, S.D. and Stenner, P. (2009). *Psychology Without Foundations: History, Philosophy and Psychosocial Theory*. London: Sage.

- Bruun Jensen, C. & Rödje, K. (2009). Introduction. In *Deleuzian Intersections in Science, Technology and Anthropology*, eds. C. Bruun Jensen and K. Rodje. Oxford: Berghahn, pp. 1-37
- Cromby, J., Harper, D. & Reavey, P. (2013). *Psychology, Mental Health and Distress*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Deleuze, G. (1986). *Cinema 1: the movement-image*. London: Athlone.
- Deleuze, G. (1988). *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*. San Francisco: City Lights.
- Deleuze, G. (1989). *Cinema 2: the time image*. London: Athlone.
- Deleuze, G. (1990a). *Negotiations: 1972-1990*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Deleuze, G. (1990b). *The Logic of Sense*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Deleuze, G. (1992). *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*. New York:, Zone.
- Deleuze, G. (2000). *Proust and Signs* (2nd ed). London:, Athlone.
- Deleuze, G. (2001). *Pure Immanence: essays on a life*. New York: Urzone.
- Deleuze, G. (2004). *Desert Islands and Other Texts 1953-1974*. New York: Semiotext(e).
- Deleuze, G. (2006). *Two Regimes of Madness*. New York: Semiotext(e).
- Deleuze, G and F. Guattari (1994). *What is Philosophy?* London: Verso.
- Gibson JJ. (1979). *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. London: Routledge.
- Heft, H. (2012). *Ecological Psychology in Context: James Gibson, Roger Barker, and the Legacy of William James's Radical Empiricism*. London: Routledge.
- Hutchins, E. (1995) *Cognition in the Wild*. Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press.
- James, W. ([1909]2003). *The Meaning of Truth*. New York: Dover.
- Lewin, K. (1936). *Principles of Topological Psychology*. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Lewin, K. (1997). *Field Theory in Social Science*. Washington: APA.
- Massumi, B. (2002). *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Negri, A. (1991). *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza's Metaphysics and Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Negri, A. (2013). *Spinoza for our Time: Politics and Postmodernity*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Nichterlein, M. (2013). Recasting the theory of systemic family therapy: reading Bateson through Foucault and Deleuze. PhD, University of New South Wales.
- Sebeok, T. A. (2001). Biosemiotics: its roots, proliferation, and prospects. *Semiotica*, 134(1/4): 61-78.
- Shorter, E. (1992). *From Paralysis to Fatigue: A History of Psychosomatic Illness in the Modern Era*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Shotter, J. and J. Newson. (1982). An ecological approach to cognitive development: Implicate orders, joint action and intentionality. In *Social Cognition: Studies in the Development of Understanding*, eds. G. Butterworth and P. Light. Sussex: Harvester.
- Stengers, I. (2011). *Thinking With Whitehead: A Free and Wild Creation of Concepts*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

- Vaalsiner, J & Gertz, S.K. (2007). General conclusions. In *Semiotic Rotations: Modes of Meaning in Cultural Worlds*, eds. S.K. Gertz, J. Vaalsiner and J.-P. Breaux. New York: Information Age.
- von Uexküll, J. (2010). *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans with A Theory of Meaning*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Warde-Brown, A. (2017). Mutually autonomous continua: exploring the relationship between music and the moving image in the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze. Dissertation, Royal Holloway University of London.
- Whitehead, A.N. ([1929]1978). *Process and Reality*. New York: Free Press.
- Williams, J. (2013). *Gilles Deleuze's Difference and Repetition: A critical introduction and guide*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

